

William Tilmouth

Eulogy for my brother

12th March 2015
St. Mary's Cathedral, Darwin

To Kathy my brother's life long partner and his greatest support. She was my brother's anchor - whose staunch and strong and ever steadfast no nonsense approach stabilised a man who could easily have taken another direction entirely in life.

To Shaneen, Catherine and Mandy his daughters his very reason and purpose for being the good father he became to be.

I once asked him how did he get it so right his reply was that at an early age he recognised that he had not been socialised into parenting and the skills that were required.

So he let Kathy take on the major role and his job was to be the supplier of the hugs and a shoulder to cry on.

To his grandchildren Elaina and Yvette the next generation. He said they belonged to the future and we belong to the past. He was affectionately known to them as the grumpy man.

There are many many individual stories that we here today have. This bloke was bigger than Ben Hur himself.

He walked with many from traditional owners, native title owners, land councils, prime ministers, politicians local and federal, pastoralist, stock inspectors, farmers, croc farmers, accountants, bureaucrats, lawyers, judges, bankers, miners, millionaires, writers and even the purveyor of the finest bacon and egg sandwiches at the Parap shopping centre markets - he walked with us all.

There was no place out of bounds to this brother.

His ability to think the big ideas to see the big picture had no limit. He could dream the dream. He did that to the end. Even in hospital (whilst marinating as he called it) he took the time to dream of a better day with better outcomes for the most disadvantaged people. His people.

We all have heard of a snappy quote from him he was master of the one liner, but one quote that sticks with me is:

The trauma of not having, or not being able to bond without your family, being one with your parents, working out what the basic aspects of love and comfort is and taking that through to your adult life is extremely traumatic. LEIGH BRUCE 'TRACKER' TILMOUTH

This quote is just a glimpse, a peep, into the life of this man and what motivated him.

He was angry, hurt, and severely traumatised by the simple fact that our rights as brothers and as children were taken from us. Our fathers rights who wanted to keep us. Our Aunty Doreen who said

she would take us in. They were shattered and we grew up scared, confused, lost. We were luckier than many because we had each other.

Our basic human right to choice and to choose was denied us as a family and as a people. We know what it meant to our mothers to have their babies disappear. But also for our fathers. Imagine their pain and sense of failure. Our men, with our women, kept alive the longest living culture in the world. Everything we do as a people is connected first to our land and to each other – and that law is protected in our language. When we were taken, it was an act of genocide.

Our homes and our families were invaded by policy and police

My brother was angry not only because of what happened to us, but because it remains the same today as it was when we were children. It is the same ration, served on a different plate, served by a different master.

Too often we have had prescribe solution trust upon us .

Too often this was and is done by people who know nothing about us.

I recall on many occasions my brothers and I would sit alone and cry never knowing why or what for.

In deep sadness our collective tears and grief flowed into a vacuum that never filled and has remained with us for our entire lives.

We were sent away under the assimilation policy.

The stolen generation.

A title that is belittled by people who grew up knowing the love of a mother and the warm sanctuary of a family. I have heard the whispers saying " you weren't stolen it was for your own good " or " you guys won't have enough sticks to belt each other with," when we would meet .

Because someone thought they knew what was best for us.

We were denied our family, our identity, our language and culture.

We were taught how to pay our rent in advance hide our identity and keep our relatives away.

Assimilation left us asking: Who are we? Where do we belong? Where do we fit into the scheme of things? Or even was there room for us?

Our brother was defined by this...

Early childhood adversity dramatically affects health of the individual across a life time

I can remember, and many of you who had him stay over at your homes or camped with him on the numerous occasions out bush, may wonder why you experienced his restless nights, his nightmares sometimes quite dramatic or scary.

A dear uncle of ours would talk about how he whilst camping out bush with him, never got any sleep because brother was so restless.

Getting up, laying down, talking all the time in his sleep. The pointing and shouting at the corner of the room. His defense mechanism in his brain never switched off.

He was a driven man with no time to rest.

The humour that he was so famously renowned for masked his trauma.

And sadly many of the brothers and sisters we grew up with never made it this far.

The body reflects what the mind harbours - and how blind are we?

Adverse early childhood experiences are the single greatest unaddressed public health threat facing our people today.

Is it high time we reviewed our policies on what decisions we make when it comes to children in care in institutions or in detention; Or simply the ones in our own families.

Children must be front and centre in all our endeavours.

They must be at the centre of the family and the family the centre of the community and maybe that will be the best approach leading to less trauma and better outcomes.

Aboriginal people around the world struggle because their identity and cultural world view is denied. Aboriginal children and young people are growing up lost.

What defines us as a people must be at the heart of what we do.

Land, kinship and language – control over our social and political life – this is where it begins

Our duty is to our children and our grandchildren.

Our duty is to make sure that they do not experience the trauma that we have.

Because this crazy world will be theirs into the future.

My brother was fearless – he did not have time for polite conversation. He said it as he saw it.

We didn't always agree – siblings never do. But he fought for our rights as people – our political rights, our economic rights – the rights of our children and grandchildren. He would not settle for the crumbs at the end of a meal – or the bread to mop up someone else's gravy – he wanted it all.

Let us get real about the future of our people – if we are to honour him with a state funeral, let us honor him by having the real conversation with us.

Don't use us as your handbags, don't just talk to the black people who make you feel comfortable and speak your language. Don't spend time with us because it makes you feel like you have done your job.

Listen to the leaders of our people who stand behind us – to our community who stand next to us. We are the translators of their law and vision and aspiration.

Listen and be bold enough to do things differently - because if you didn't hear him when he was alive, hear him now, our people are dying and we are yet to be equal around your table.

So in conclusion I pose the question

Given the ideal foundation in life would anything be different for my brother?

My answer is yes because my brother was gifted at all he put his hand to and I believe he would have still been with us today.